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PRESS RELEASE

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TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF BRITISH PRINTS
Through February 3, 1984

Two Hundred Years of British Prints, an exhibition of 125 prints from the collections of The Cleveland Museum of Art, on view at the Museum through February 3, 1984, includes a number of works which are considered landmarks in the history of British printmaking. The exhibition illuminates the significant technical and creative achievements of British printmakers and provides an overview of British printmaking from the mid-18th century to the present day.

Prior to the mid-18th century, English printmakers generally engraved portraits or reproduced paintings and drawings of prominent artists. The best of these printmakers were skillful and sensitive artists whose prints are beautiful and valuable works in their own right. One such early example is a copy of Anthony van Dyck's painting of Prince Rupert, a German nephew of Charles I, by the first important English engraver, William Faithorne. Rupert introduced into England the technique of mezzotint, which duplicates the smooth transitions of tone and rich, dark shadows of oil painting, and became extremely popular for reproducing paintings, particularly portraits, in the 18th century.

During the 1750s a small number of British painters began to explore the creative possibilities of various print media. Paul Sandby pioneered the use in England of aquatint, which imitates watercolor and ink washes, to produce some of the finest landscape prints of the time. Thomas Gainsborough experimented with aquatint and soft-ground etching, which simulates the appearance of a pencil or chalk drawing, to obtain beautiful effects of light and texture in his landscape

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prints. George Stubbs combined etching, engraving, mezzotint, and other processes on a single plate, producing beautiful prints with extremely refined tones.

In 1801 the printer Philip André took over the English patent on the new process of lithography from its German inventor, Alois Senefelder. To advertise the process, André persuaded leading English painters to try this new technique; some fine examples of this first important artistic use of the medium in England are in this exhibition. Other milestones in British lithography are some early colored lithographs: Thomas Shotter Boys's views of picturesque French architecture and David Roberts's large scenes of ancient sites in the Near East.

Some early 19th-century printmakers also recognized printmaking as an expressive medium. The landscape painters John Crome and John Sell Cotman were among the first to employ etching for its own sake, and the painter John Martin was one of the first to use mezzotint creatively in his dramatic Biblical scenes. Another revolutionary printmaker of this period was the visionary William Blake, represented by two wood engravings and four superb copper engravings with decorative borders and hand lettering from his celebrated Book of Job.

An influential British printmaker of the second half of the 19th century, Francis Seymour Haden, reacted against the excessively worked and finished etchings of many of his predecessors and developed a loose, open style of etching. Haden's style--in which the principal incidents are set off by large areas of luminous white paper--inspired a number of early 20th-century printmakers, notably the Scots Muirhead Bone and James McBey and the Englishmen Frank Short and Edmund Blampied.

Toward the end of the 19th century there was a revival of interest in the woodcut and in finely produced books such as those designed by William Morris with woodcut illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones. Contrasting with the tightly worked designs of Burne-Jones are the bold, simplified shapes of William Nicholson's prints, which were a revolutionary departure from traditional woodcut design.

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The selection of 20th-century prints also shows great diversity in technique and style, ranging from Frederick Landseer Griggs's minutely detailed 1920s etchings of medieval architecture to Henry Moore's 1970 series of etchings exploring the sculptural forms of elephant skulls, to large-scale contemporary works by painters Bridget Riley and David Hockney.

Two Hundred Years of British Prints was organized by Jane Glaubinger, assistant curator of prints and drawings at The Cleveland Museum of Art. Gallery talks on the exhibition will be given on Wednesday, January 16, and Sunday, January 20, at 1:30 pm.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.